

REMARKS

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On the Occasion
of the

FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF MAN'S FIRST LUNAR LANDING

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Most of us find time scarce for serious reflection about the fate and future of mankind as we busy ourselves with the concerns of the day. Most of our lives are not spent facing the momentous questions of the age. Everyday problems occupy most of our time and thought. So it is appropriate that we take advantage of an occasion such as this to meditate about the meaning of historical events that have touched our lives and to determine what we can learn from them.

Like other great milestones in history, Apollo stands out prominently against the background of ordinary events. This one magnificent achievement clearly overshadows and stands out as the most memorable event of our era.

Important historical events are those that affect many people over a long period of time. They are the hallmarks of mankind's progress. Clearly, Apollo qualifies by that or any other definition of a truly historic occasion. When the "Eagle" landed at Tranquility, man burst the bonds that for millions of years tied humanity to this small and fragile planet.

There is little likelihood that the epic accomplishments of Apollo will be lost in the pages of history. There is, however, a very real danger that our own generation may too soon forget that progress has a price which society must be willing to pay.

Today, for example, we face a number of crises: energy, pollution, urban congestion, crime, inflation and so on. All of these problems affect us in very direct, immediate, and personal ways and properly rank high on our list of priorities.

But in establishing national priorities, we must be mindful that no matter how pressing the demands or acute the crises of its time, every progressive society to remain strong must commit a portion of its resources for programs to advance human knowledge and progress.

Universities, research programs, scientific investigations, all require a commitment that at the time seem difficult to support, when weighed against the needs of the day.

And in every age there have been critics of programs that have no immediate payout, or do not address directly the immediate and urgent problems of the time.

The space program is such a program. The dollars we spend on space research and exploration produce no instant supply of food for the hungry, no shelter for the homeless, no clothing for the ragged. Spinoffs from space technology have helped in innumerable ways to improve everyday life for thousands of people, but NASA programs provide no quick, ready-made solution to the major ills that afflict mankind. Yet in the long run, the benefits of our programs may return many times over the cost of the initial investment. In fact, when our descendants look back on it, the first manned landing on the moon most certainly will be considered the outstanding event of the 20th century and probably more. July 20, 1969 may be remembered in the future as the day man ended an era of one-planet civilization and began a new age as traveler and colonizer of the Universe.

In times past, decisions to embark on great undertakings were made for people by royalty or their religious leaders. It is still the responsibility of leaders to lead, to point the way. But in a democratic society, the final decision rests ultimately with the people themselves. They must voluntarily choose to make the sacrifices needed to assure progress. This choice was made by our Republic year after year until that day was reached five years ago and men, our men, made the first steps off our planet and into the solar system.

Most Americans continue to have a strong commitment to the future and are willing to spend a portion of this country's bountiful resources on a better tomorrow for all the world's people. Despite current difficulties and gloomy prophecies by well-meaning but short-sighted critics, our nation and the rest of human kind will make more of these steps into the vast but exciting reaches of our solar system.